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**CONSUMER PROTECTION THROUGH LICENSURE OF PHYSICAL THERAPISTS AND PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANTS HOD P06-19-51-57** [Amended: HOD P06-16-08-07; Initial: HOD P06-14-08-18] [Position]

It is the position of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) that licensure of physical therapists and licensure or certification of physical therapist assistants is required in and by all United States jurisdictions to achieve public protection and consumer transparency for individuals who access physical therapist services. Physical therapy is provided only by or under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist. Physical therapist assistants, under the direction and supervision of the physical therapist, are the only individuals who may assist the physical therapist in practice and may be appropriately utilized in components of intervention and in collection of selected examination and outcomes data. APTA supports open, flexible, and dynamic principles of licensure to ensure workforce mobility and timely access to care. These principles are outlined as follows:

**PRINCIPLE I. MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE OR REGULATION**

**A. Physical Therapist and Physical Therapist Assistant Licensure or Regulation**

Physical therapists are licensed and physical therapist assistants are licensed or certified in all United States jurisdictions.

1. State regulation of physical therapists should at a minimum:
  - (a) require graduation from a physical therapist education program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) or in the case of an internationally educated physical therapist from a non-CAPTE accredited program seeking licensure as a physical therapist, a substantially equivalent education;
  - (b) require passing an exam of entry-level competence;
  - (c) provide title and term protection including a protected regulatory designator;
  - (d) allow for disciplinary action; and
  - (e) provide for a defined scope of practice.
  
2. State regulation of physical therapist assistants should at a minimum:
  - (a) Require graduation from a physical therapist assistant program accredited by CAPTE; or, in the case of a graduate of an international physical therapist assistant program from a non-CAPTE accredited program seeking licensure, certification, or registration as a physical therapist assistant, a substantially equivalent education; or, in the case of a graduate of a US or international physical therapist education program seeking licensure, certification, or registration as a physical therapist assistant where permitted by law, a substantially equivalent education to a US-educated physical therapist assistant as determined by credentials review;
  - (b) require passing an exam of entry-level competence;
  - (c) provide title and term protection;
  - (d) allow for disciplinary action; and
  - (e) require that all physical therapist assistants work under the direction and supervision of the

physical therapist.

B. Foreign-Educated Physical Therapist: Substantial Equivalence for Licensure Eligibility

APTA supports the concept that to be eligible for jurisdictional licensure as a physical therapist, an individual educated outside of the United States must demonstrate substantial equivalence in content of education and clinical preparation to that received in a program accredited by CAPTE.

PRINCIPLE II. STATE REGULATORY DESIGNATIONS FOR THE PHYSICAL THERAPY PROFESSION

A. Designation "PT," "PTA," "SPT," and "SPTA"

APTA supports the use of "PT" as the regulatory designation of a physical therapist. APTA also supports the use of the regulatory designation of "DPT" in any state where a uniform designation of "DPT" is approved in the practice act and/or by a licensing authority for all licensed physical therapists in that state. In addition, APTA supports, where authorized by the practice act and/or regulatory authority of the jurisdiction, the use of "DPT" as the regulatory designation when a doctoral-level degree (for example: DPT, PhD, DSc) has been obtained. In these cases, the additional use of "PT" is not required, and #1 and #2 in the preferred order of letter designations (below) are subsumed in the single designation "DPT" for physical therapists. Other letter designations such as "RPT," and "LPT," should not be substituted for the regulatory designation of "PT." "PTA" is the preferred regulatory designation of a physical therapist assistant.

APTA supports the recognition of the regulatory designation of a physical therapist or a physical therapist assistant as taking precedence over other credentials or letter designations. To promote consistent communication within and external to the profession in the presentation of credentials and letter designations, the association shall recognize the following preferred order:

1. PT or DPT, PTA (the regulatory designation)
2. Highest earned physical therapy-related degree
3. Other regulatory designations
4. Other earned academic degree(s)

All other designations, such as American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties certifications, credentials external to APTA, and other certifications or professional honors, should not use acronyms or abbreviations but should, if used, be written out. In the case of stationary, business cards, signage, advertising, or signature lines, such descriptions should be placed below the line containing the name and letter designations specified in 1 through 4 above. The option shall exist for either writing out Catherine Worthingham Fellow of the American Physical Therapy Association or abbreviating it as FAPTA.

The following examples will serve as style guides:

Tamica Dallas, PT, DPT  
Board-Certified Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Clinical Specialist

James Kuta, PT, DPT, PhD  
Catherine Worthingham Fellow of the American Physical Therapy Association

Danyelle Newkirk, DPT (where sole use of DPT without PT is permitted by regulatory authority)  
Certified Hand Therapist

Seth Coney, PT, DSc  
Board-Certified Orthopaedic Clinical Specialist  
Fellow of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists

Denna Dilullo, PT, ATC/L, MS  
Board-Certified Sports Clinical Specialist  
Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist

APTA supports the designations “SPT” and “SPTA” for physical therapist students and physical therapist assistant students, respectively, up to the time of graduation. Following graduation and prior to licensure or certification, graduates should be designated in accordance with state law. If state law does not stipulate a specific designation, graduates should be designated in a way that clearly identifies that they are not licensed physical therapists or licensed or certified physical therapist assistants.

### PRINCIPLE III. APPROPRIATE USE OF PROTECTED TERMS AND TITLES BY LICENSEES

#### A. Protection of Term, Title, and Designation

The terms “physical therapy” and “physiotherapy” shall be used only in reference to services that are provided by or under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist/physiotherapist; when so used the terms are synonymous. Only physical therapists may use or include the initials “PT” or “DPT,” and only physical therapist assistants may use or include the initials “PTA” in their professional, technical, or regulatory designation.

APTA supports the use of the titles “Physical Therapist” and “Doctor of Physical Therapy” only for physical therapists and in accordance with jurisdictional law. To provide accurate information to consumers, use of “Dr.” or “Doctor” should always be associated with words that clearly communicate that it is identifying a licensed physical therapist.

Additionally, APTA supports the inclusion of language to protect the exclusive use of these terms, titles, and designations in statutes and regulations.

### PRINCIPLE IV. TEMPORARY EXEMPTIONS TO STATE LICENSURE

#### A. Temporary Exemptions for Licensees with Traveling Teams or Performance Groups

APTA supports temporary exemptions to state licensure for physical therapists who are licensed in a jurisdiction in the United States but who are temporarily in another jurisdiction providing physical therapist services to members of established athletic teams, athletic corporations, or performing arts companies that are training, competing, or performing.

#### B. Temporary Exemptions for Education

APTA supports inclusion of temporary exemptions to state licensure for physical therapists who are licensed in a United States jurisdiction and are temporarily in another jurisdiction for teaching, demonstrating, or providing physical therapist services in connection with teaching or participating in an educational seminar, fellowship, or residency program.

#### C. Temporary Exemptions for Declared Disaster or Emergency

APTA supports temporary exemptions to state licensure for physical therapists or physical therapist assistants who are licensed or certified in a United States jurisdiction and enter another jurisdiction to

provide physical therapy services during a declared local, state, or national disaster or emergency. APTA also supports temporary exemptions to state licensure for physical therapists or physical therapist assistants who are licensed or certified in a United States jurisdiction and are forced to leave their residences or places of employment due to a local, state, or national disaster or emergency, and because of such displacement they seek to provide physical therapy in another jurisdiction. APTA encourages state chapters and state regulatory boards to include such exemption language in their state practice acts and to promulgate and/or review emergency management plans to ensure continuity in the event of a local, state, or national disaster or emergency.

#### PRINCIPLE V. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND CONTINUING COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR LICENSURE RENEWAL

##### A. Licensure Renewal: Continuing Education and Continuing Competence

APTA supports the concept of continuing education and continuing competence as an integral component of professional development and as a condition of licensure renewal.

Licensure renewal requirements to demonstrate evidence of continuing competence should be limited to meeting the current minimum standards necessary to ensure ongoing safe and effective practice for public protection.

APTA recognizes and supports the approval of continuing education related to roles in practice management, administration, research, or education in addition to or as components of continuing education in patient/client management, for meeting continuing education requirements for license renewal.

#### PRINCIPLE VI. OPPOSITION TO INSTITUTIONAL LICENSURE

##### A. Institutional Licensure

APTA is strongly opposed to the concept of institutional licensure for individuals who deliver health care services without jurisdictional licensure.

#### PRINCIPLE VII. LICENSURE PORTABILITY

##### A. Interstate Licensure Portability

APTA supports state licensure models that allow for licensure portability, including but not limited to an Interstate Licensure Compact for Physical Therapy.

##### B. Licensure: Expedited Licensure

APTA supports an expedited licensure process for physical therapists who have an unrestricted license in a United States jurisdiction to practice in another United States jurisdiction, in order to participate in educational opportunities such as fellowship and residency programs.

##### C. Temporary Jurisdictional Licensure

APTA opposes temporary unrestricted jurisdictional licensure of physical therapists or licensure or certification of physical therapist assistants for previously non-U.S.-licensed or non-U.S.-credentialed applicants in all jurisdictions.

#### PRINCIPLE VIII. STATE LICENSURE FOR STUDENT CLINICAL EDUCATION AND EXAM-ELIGIBLE GRADUATES

APTA supports provisional or restricted state licensure for student physical therapists enrolled in terminal full-time clinical education experiences including clinical internships as defined by the American Council of Academic Physical Therapy.<sup>1</sup>

APTA also supports provisional or restricted licensure for graduates, or for those who have completed all of the requirements for graduation, of programs accredited by CAPTE who are eligible for the National Physical Therapy Examination.

#### REFERENCES

1. Erickson M, Birkmeier M, Booth M, et al. Recommendations from the Common Terminology Panel of the American Council of Academic Physical Therapy. *Phys Ther.* 2018;98(9):754-762. <https://doi.org/10.1093>.

#### **Explanation of Reference Numbers:**

HOD P00-00-00-00 stands for House of Delegates/month/year/page/vote in the House of Delegates minutes; the "P" indicates that it is a position (see below). For example, HOD P06-17-05-04 means that this position can be found in the June 2017 House of Delegates minutes on Page 5 and that it was Vote 4.

P: Position | S: Standard | G: Guideline | Y: Policy | R: Procedure